



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **North Dakota Observes National Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month**

BISMARCK, N.D. – In observance of National Viral Hepatitis Awareness Month in May, the North Dakota Department of Health is encouraging residents to learn more about the disease and to go in for testing if they are at risk for hepatitis, according to Sarah Weninger, Hepatitis Program coordinator for the Department of Health.

The following are the three most common types of viral hepatitis in the United States. All three can cause liver disease.

- Hepatitis A can last a few weeks to several months. The virus usually is spread when a person eats or drinks something contaminated with fecal matter of an infected person. The best way to prevent hepatitis A is by getting vaccinated.
- Hepatitis B can cause a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness or even death. The virus usually is spread when blood or body fluid from a person infected with hepatitis B enters the body of someone who is not infected. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated.
- Hepatitis C usually lasts a lifetime and can result in long-term health problems or even death. The virus usually is spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected. There are treatment options available, but there is no vaccine for hepatitis C, so the best way to prevent it is to avoid behaviors that put you at risk.

Because most people who are infected with hepatitis have no symptoms, the Department of Health encourages anyone who has engaged in any of the following high risk behavior to consult with their health-care provider about being tested. Risk factors include:

- Sharing needles to inject drugs.
- Receiving blood products prior to 1992.
- Getting “home tattoos” or tattoos from unlicensed and unregulated tattoo shops.
- Having multiple sexual partners.
- Being born to an infected mother.

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More than three million people in the United States have chronic hepatitis C virus infection, which is the major cause of chronic liver disease and the leading reason for liver transplantation. Additionally one in 12 people worldwide are living with either chronic hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Since 2005, an average of three people test positive for hepatitis A, 65 for hepatitis B, and 548 for hepatitis C each year in North Dakota.

In North Dakota, the following sites offer vaccinations to protect against hepatitis A and B and free testing for hepatitis C:

- Bismarck/Burleigh Public Health, Bismarck
- Central Valley Health Unit, Jamestown
- Custer Health, Mandan
- Fargo Cass Public Health, Fargo
- First District Health Unit, Minot
- Grand Forks Public Health Department, Grand Forks
- Lake Region District Health, Devils Lake
- Richland Country Health Department, Wahpeton
- Southwestern District Health Unit, Dickinson
- Upper Missouri District Health, Williston

For more information, call the North Dakota Department of Health's Viral Hepatitis Program at 701.328.2378 or 800.472.2180 or visit [www.ndhealth.gov/disease](http://www.ndhealth.gov/disease).

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